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## **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 5497, AN ACT IMPLEMENTING AN I-BEST PROGRAM THROUGHOUT THE CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM**

Good Afternoon Senator Cassano, Representative Willis and Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. I am Roger Senserrich, Policy Coordinator at the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS is a statewide, nonprofit agency that works to reduce poverty and promote economic success through both policy and program work.

I am here to express our support for HB5497, a bill that aims to improve post secondary education in Connecticut. This bill would expand the successful I-BEST model implemented at Eastern Connecticut State University to the rest of the state.

Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) is an educational model developed by the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) in which basic instructors and technical faculty jointly design and teach college-level occupational classes for basic skill level students.

The I-BEST model started in 2004 with 10 pilot programs funded by the SBCTC to test different models to increase the rate at which basic skills students move on to college level programs. Researchers found that combining basic skills and college level technical education by a team of instructors proved the most effective, as hands on experience complemented higher level learning. By 2007, all community and technical colleges were offering I-BEST programs.

The model has proved successful. Students are more likely to continue into credit-bearing coursework, earn college credit or attain obtain a certificate, and increase scores on basic skill tests. College retention rates improved markedly: 78 percent of I-BEST students were still enrolled the following year, compared to 61 percent for regular students. 55 percent of I-BEST students earned a certificate, compared to 15 percent of students not taking I-BEST courses.<sup>1</sup>

Connecticut has implemented some I-BEST based programs in Hartford and New Haven, as well as Eastern Connecticut State University, often with good results. The scale and scope of these pilots, however, has been modest; this legislation would open the doors to a major expansion of this successful model.

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<sup>1</sup> Wachen, J., Jenkins, D. and Van Noy, M. (2010) *How I-BEST Works: Findings from a Field Study of Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Program*. Community College Research Center, Columbia.

The need for increasing the skills of Connecticut's workforce is great. According to the Connecticut Commission on Higher Education, 70% of jobs in the state will require postsecondary education by 2020. A 2011 survey of Connecticut manufacturers conducted by CBIA showed that employers have difficulties finding skilled workers for many positions, from CNC programmers and machinists to CAD technicians and engineers. Those are the highly qualified workers with high paying jobs that should be the core of the state's economic in upcoming years, but we are failing to train them.

As of 2011, 42% of Connecticut's workforce has completed at least an associate degree.<sup>2</sup> Our workforce is still one of the most educated in the nation (Connecticut ranks 4<sup>th</sup> in this indicator), but unless we act now, we risk falling behind. Our state often fails at helping students complete their education: 22% of adults 18-64 in the state have completed some post-secondary education, but did not obtain a degree. Community colleges have struggled to help students graduate: less than 15% of students complete their degrees in less than three years, and close to 50% are not even enrolled after that period. The numbers are even lower for those that need remedial education, with only 8% of students even completing a credential.

We need to do better. Connecticut took some very important, bold steps with remedial education reform (PA 12-40), but we need to go further, implementing best practices with proven results in other states. I-BEST is one of these practice models: integrated programs that offer college level courses that are open to all kinds of students, and that offer real academic and career opportunities in a proven, effective manner.

We believe, however, that any successful implementation of I-BEST will require building solid partnerships between state agencies, community colleges and local adult education programs, as well as additional resources to cover the costs. The legislation should provide the tools to make these partnerships possible, and include the necessary funding to make them effective. Only this way Connecticut's educational institutions will be able to provide the skilled labor force the state needs. The I-BEST model is great starting point.

Thank you for hearing our concerns today.

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<sup>2</sup> Data from the Population Reference Bureau for the Working Poor Families Project.